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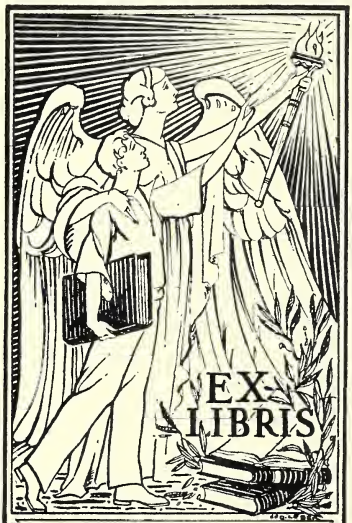
MY SEARCH FOR SUNSHINE AND
LAUGHTER
Robert Smithdas & Dana L. Thomas



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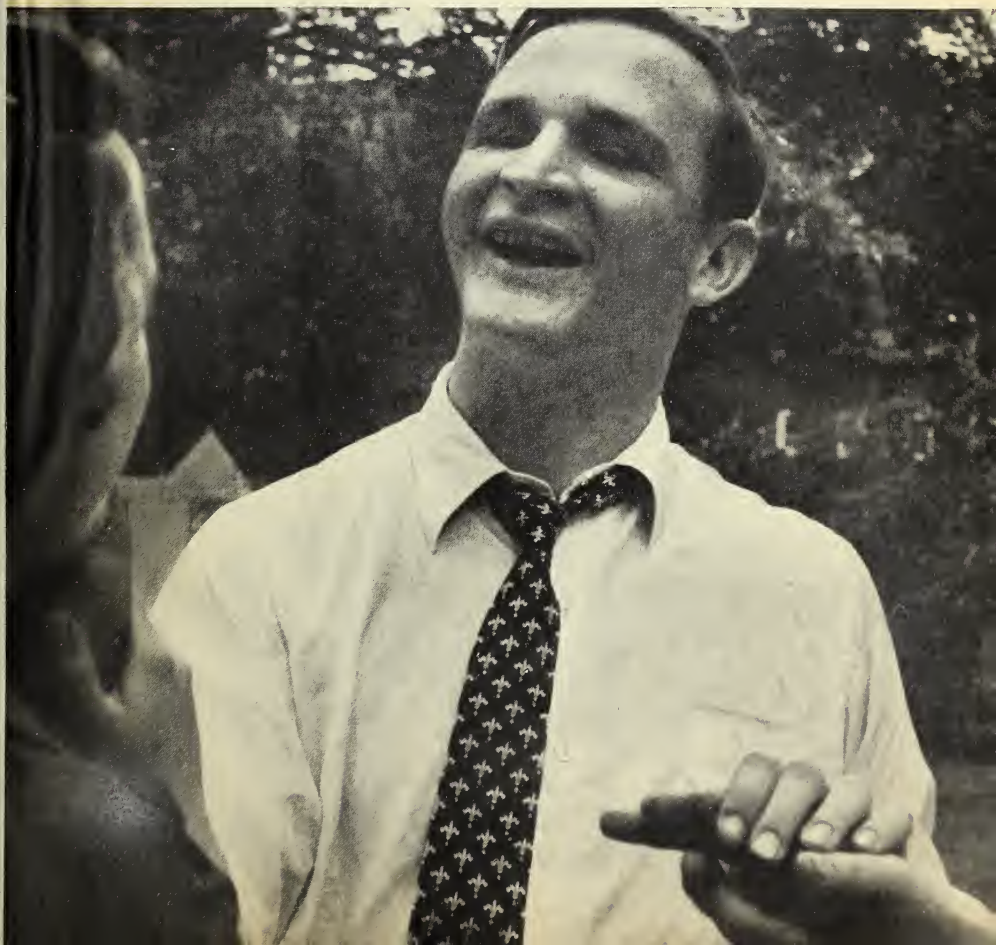
My Search For Sunshine and Laughter

BY ROBERT J. SMITHDAS WITH DANA LEE THOMAS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ED FEINGERSH



Popular with the children at this nursery for the blind, Bob plans to have a family of his own someday.

As a boy, he found himself in a world without light or sound. At 30, he has two university degrees, devotes himself to helping others who are deaf and blind

● **I am 30 years old.** Each year I appear on lecture platforms all over the country to speak to business leaders, civic groups and housewives on behalf of the deaf and blind. I know my subject well because I am totally deaf and blind myself. I cannot see the audiences I address or hear a single word I speak. Since the age of five I have not seen a human being smile. Since I was nine I have not heard laughter. But I am one of the lucky ones. I was given a chance. I have managed to go through college and to become the first deaf-blind person ever to earn a master's degree. I have been taught how to communicate with people through vibration speech reading—that is, by placing my fingers over their lips and throat and detecting their speech vibrations.

On the lecture platform I have acquired a great deal of self-confidence, even though I am like a pilot flying blind in a blizzard. I have to grope through each sentence by instinct, much as I feel my way through buildings and streets.

Being blind and deaf has some advantages. In my world there is no ugliness. My loved ones have remained eternally young to me. I have learned to develop a sense of humor that protects me from the embarrassments of life. At more than one formal dinner, I have dug my knife and fork hungrily into the succulent roast chicken of the lady or gentleman sitting next to me under the impression that it was my own. Whatever I have accomplished has been hailed as a special achievement. When, in 1950, I was graduated from St. John's College with my BA degree, the newspapers pointed out that I was the first deaf-blind person to have equaled the success of Helen Keller 50 years previously. President Truman sent me a wire of congratulations and Pope Pius XII bestowed on me a special Apostolic Benediction. A deaf-blind person, however, does not have his head turned by such recognition. He is always aware that any achievement of his was made possible only through the efforts of many other people.

To appreciate the extent of my opportunity, it is necessary to go back to the beginning —to July, 1930, when I was struck with the cerebrospinal meningitis that took away my sight and hearing. I was five years old. I had been playing by myself, running up and down in front of the red brick houses on Sunnyland Street, Pittsburgh, chasing the June bugs and butterflies. I recall to this hour the large gray cat with yellow eyes that was stretched out lazily on a porch across the street from my home.

It was noon when my mother called me for lunch. She came out to the yard and stood behind the hedge, hands on hips. Her brown hair was swept backward in a large

Playing poker with Braille-marked cards is one of Bob's favorite pastimes. He also enjoys fishing, has won several trophies for his catches.

"In my

bun. I was reluctant to leave the sunshine even though it was time for my nap. I insisted I did not feel at all tired. But mother insisted that I come inside.

After lunch I went into the living room. The curtains were drawn; the room had a dusky light that made me feel drowsy. Lying on the sofa, tracing in the air the designs of the flowers on the wallpaper, I gradually fell asleep. I have no recollection of how long I slept. When I awoke, I felt a sharp stabbing pain in the center of my back, running up and down my spine. I cried out.

Within seconds my mother was bending over me, asking what was the trouble. Then everything began to fade. I felt myself sinking into the darkness, still crying out with pain. I awoke only once to find myself folded in my mother's arms; we were in a car with two other people, and I caught a glimpse of houses and trees flashing past the windows. The pain was gone now; there was only the sensation of being very weak.

I spent nearly three months in the hospital. During most of this time I was unconscious. On a few occasions I was able to notice trivial things—a nurse in a blue and white uniform bending over me, and a white pitcher and a glass standing on a tray. These were my last visible signs of the normal world in which I had lived.

When I finally regained full consciousness, I found myself huddled on a thick feather quilt. I could not remember what had happened. I rubbed my eyes to erase the film of drowsiness that clung to me.

My mother spoke close to my ear, very slowly and distinctly.

"Bobby, are you all right?"

I wanted to know where I was.

"You are at home, darling, safe with Mommy and Daddy."

I could sense that my mother was crying. When I placed my fingers on her eyes, I felt their wetness. I did not know that I was blind, that I had lost all hearing in my left ear and most of the hearing in my right one.

I stretched out my hand uncertainly and touched something. As I ran my fingers over its surface, I gradually recognized its shape. It was one of our kitchen chairs. I drew myself to my knees and tried to stand up. But I slipped backwards into the feather quilt.

The weeks that followed are hazy. I had no sense of time. For six months after my illness, I was unable to distinguish between night and day. I would refuse to go to sleep, insisting that it was still daylight. I would awaken at night shouting for food. Sometimes my father, hearing me scream for ice cream at two in the morning, would get into his clothes and go searching for a drugstore that might still be open.

Gradually things improved. I learned to recognize familiar people, learned to distinguish, through vibrations, the short footsteps of a child's from an adult's. I found my father's walk heavy and thumping; my mother's, quicker in rhythm.

Lecturing on behalf of the deaf and blind is Bob's job. He urges business leaders and civic groups to give handicapped people the chance to earn their way as productive citizens.

world there is no ugliness"

Curious about everything, I stumbled about the house bumping into tables, bloodying my face. I opened closets and sniffed at every piece of clothing and hardware. Tasting things became a passion. Because flowers usually had enchanting odors, I often nibbled at their petals until I learned to tell one from another.

Although I was warned not to wander out of our backyard, I secretly expanded my explorations until I knew all the landmarks on our side of Sunnyland Street. I kept on the sidewalk, sensing when I was straying close to the curb by feeling a slight slant of the sidewalk and a crack between the slanted area and the main part of the sidewalk.

The rest of my hearing deteriorated rapidly after my illness. As time passed, others spoke to me less and less since it was a nuisance to talk inches away from my ear and repeat things constantly. However, my mother remained the closest person in the world to me. I would sit for hours at her feet asking questions. Once I asked, "Mommy, can I touch God?"

I felt her soft reply, "Yes, Bobby, you can touch God. If you reach out for Him, you will find Him at your finger tips waiting to lead you safely through the darkness."

A year after my illness, my father brought me to the Western Pennsylvania School for the Blind. I was puzzled to find him carrying a small suitcase. I asked him several times what was in it, but he didn't answer. When we arrived at the school, Miss Sprankle, the boys' matron, showed me my room on the second floor. Still it didn't dawn on me that this was of any importance. Before my father left, he told me he would return soon. I allowed myself to be led into the schoolroom by one of the teachers; here I spent most of the afternoon playing with toys.

But in the late afternoon, when the other children had gone out into the playground, I began to wonder why my father hadn't come back yet. I stood beside a swing in the back of the playground feeling miserable. Suddenly I began to cry, quietly at first, then uncontrollably.

I could hardly eat supper that evening. When one of the older boys took me upstairs to my room, I undressed in a storm of tears. That night I dreamed of my father as I had known him when I had sight—tall, broad-shouldered, with a warm smile.

I soon learned that I was to stay at school from Monday through Friday; my father would fetch me home on weekends.

For the first few weeks I was completely bewildered. Instead of the snug rooms of my home, I was confronted by large areas where for many paces my fingers were unable to touch walls or furniture. Instead of the parents over whom I had run my fingers familiarly, there were strange men and women whose clothes had an unfamiliar texture, whose movements were unfamiliar. Even the glossy furniture felt different to my touch.

Gradually, however, I became acquainted with the teachers. Mary Catherine Clare was one of the most charming people I have ever known. Every afternoon our class began with an hour of singing. Miss Clare would sit at a piano and describe the adventures of a mountain lion in music.

Most of the time I couldn't understand the stories. My remaining hearing had the artificial quality of a cheap phonograph. I'd squirm in my chair, growing more and more restive as the story dragged on, pleading with Miss Clare to "talk louder." But she would insist she was already using all her "wind" to reach me.

About this time I became acquainted with a hearing aid. I disliked it because the voices of others still sounded blurred and indistinct, and I wanted to tear the tight earphone from my head. When my teachers realized it was failing to help me, they took it away.

Shortly after I entered kindergarten, Miss Clare taught me my first lessons in Braille. It took me weeks to identify the little groups of *(Continued on page 94)*

Giving pleasure to others is an important part of Bob's way of life. Here, without being able to see the keys or hear their music, he plays the piano so that blind children can dance.

FIREBALL

When this happy young wife stepped out of gingham into a slinky sheath, it became a world-shaking, mirth-shaking affair. . . .

BY MARY CHURCH
ILLUSTRATED BY BERNARD D'ANDREA

By the time ***The Clarenceville News*** began thumping onto front porches Wednesday afternoon and the women saw what was in the paper, most of the men in town already knew the big news. Belinda Bodeenii was coming to town—to Clarenceville!

The Fireball, the bright new Love Goddess of America, the most beautiful girl in the world, was going to appear in town for a special premiere of her latest and naughtiest picture!

A photograph of Belinda—mouth half open, eyes half shut, breasts half showing—was four columns wide on the front page of the usually very proper daily.

The men took pleasure in the picture. The girls longed to look exactly like Belinda or died a thousand deaths thinking how little they had to offer in comparison.

The wives of Clarenceville went on snapping beans, making sugar cookies, changing babies, ironing their husbands' shirts. If their husbands were going to sit down after dinner and read about Belinda while they ushered the children up to bed, it was not important. The Fireball might come to town, but they doubted very much that she would leave with any local man in tow.

That's the way most of the wives reacted to the news. Betty Jane Johnson, who had pale brown hair, but a true redheaded disposition, reacted more violently.

She walked out onto her front porch for the paper that Wednesday afternoon in early summer, a happy woman. Both Dick and Mike, her three- and two-year-old sons, were napping; she had made a chocolate meringue pie and it was cooling in the refrigerator; a veal roast was simmering in the oven; the house was in lovely order. As soon as she looked at the paper, she was going to have a shower and a change of clothes before the boys woke up and Kirk came home for dinner.

Betty Jane was twenty-four years old, as shiny as a vitamin capsule. She was married to Kirk Johnson, a twenty-five-year-old engineer who loved her like crazy.

There was no reason on earth why she should blow her top at the picture of Belinda, nor at the news that Belinda was to appear in town the very next night.

Because Belinda's new picture *(Continued on page 91)*

ing. You look the part; now act it." He pushed her out of the wing into the glare of the lights.

As she became aware of the great wave of people staring up at her she almost wilted. Without the adrenalin of her anger she might have lost her nerve. But she was angry. She was wild with anger. She glided seductively across the stage to the master of ceremonies.

Her mouth was half open, her eyes half shut, her breasts half showing. When she reached the master of ceremonies, she breathed. She just stood there and breathed audibly, ran her hands up her arms and sighed.

The audience went wild. She answered a few foolish questions as foolishly as she could, mostly with her shoulders and her eyes. Her earring dropped off; the master of ceremonies put it back on her ear. She sang the chorus of the song. She began the silly dance.

It was then that a commotion the ushers had been trying to quell in the audience broke loose. Someone leaped up on stage, Kirk. Betty Jane froze. In one stride, Kirk grabbed her by the arm and began dragging her off stage.

"Betty Jane, I could wallop you," he gasped in her ear. "Have you lost your mind, or what?"

"You take your hands off me, Kirk Johnson," she sobbed back at him, trying to break the grip he had on her arm.

But he pulled her backstage and was headed for the exit to the street when suddenly they were surrounded by reporters, photographers, contest officials and finally by the great star, Belinda Bodeenii herself. Belinda had arrived for her own appearance on stage.

They were photographed. Flash bulbs popped like a Fourth of July celebration. Finally Belinda went out on stage to wow the audience and take over the town.

Above all the excitement it was made clear that, even as Kirk had dragged her off stage, the judges had proclaimed Betty Jane the winner and, even as they had proclaimed her the winner, the contest officials had proclaimed her ineligible by virtue of the fact that she was a married woman and over twenty.

Even so, she was the reporters' pet, and they let her make the statement she had prepared for them. She would say it now for the sake of her friends, all the married women of the world who wore warm pajamas to bed. Even if she knew now that their husbands would prefer them in perfume and chiffon, she would say what should be said.

"If all the men in the world," she told the newsmen, "go on publicly drooling over glimmering redheads, pretty soon no woman will be willing to stay home and raise babies and keep house. If all the women in the world go around acting like fireballs, what will happen to the world? Who will bring up the children and make homes for everyone? I had to get all done up like this—like a fire bomb—to get any of you to look at me. When I stayed home looking after my children, you all thought I was downright uninteresting. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves," Betty Jane told the reporters.

They wrote furiously and grinned at her appreciatively.

Eventually, Kirk pried her out of the theater and drove her home. He didn't say a word. He walked carefully into the house with her. Without a word to him, Betty Jane went upstairs while Kirk drove Mrs. Follensbee home.

The boys were asleep. Betty Jane stood looking down at them. "I'll take you any time—any time," she whispered.

In her own room she took off the glamour clothes, the glittering nail polish, the false lashes. She showered, put on her boyish pajamas and went to bed and was asleep before Kirk returned.

When she awoke in the morning, Kirk was already up, buzzing his electric shaver in the bathroom. She jumped out of bed, thinking, *It's late; I'll have to hurry breakfast.* Then she sank back into bed. *Why should I bother about Kirk's breakfast,* she thought; *he'd probably prefer me languishing here in bed.*

But languishing didn't suit her. *Not even for Kirk,* she thought, *will I lie around in bed like an idiot.* She sprang out of bed, dressed in a flash and dashed into her kitchen.

Kirk came down to breakfast, as usual, bouyant and hurried. He had a pajama-clad little boy on each arm.

Her three men bent over and kissed Betty Jane all at once. She hugged all three of them, as usual and then took the boys from Kirk and put them into their high chairs. As usual, they all sat down together for breakfast. Except that the boys kept looking at her with puzzled looks. Finally Dick said, "How come your hair is all funny, Mommy?"

"Just for fun, honey. It will change back to the way it always is pretty soon."

"The sooner the better," Kirk said.

"I thought you liked it this way," Betty Jane said.

"Don't be silly," Kirk said. He finished his second cup of coffee, bent over and kissed her good-by and whispered in her ear, "Be a good girl until I get home."

He was hardly out of the house, when the telephone rang. It was the Clarenceville TV station. They wanted Betty Jane for a personal appearance. She gave them a flat, unequivocal "*no.*" She barely had the receiver down before the telephone rang again.

It rang all morning and into the afternoon. Her friends called to congratulate her, to thank her, to pass on the information that the Detroit and Chicago morning papers carried her picture and her statement. Night-club managers, newsmen, publicity people and just people called wanting statements and appearances and endorsements. She thanked her friends and said "No" to everyone else.

Libby appeared, breathless, to tell her that a TV commentator had shown her picture and read her statement on his program and had said, "Now there's a girl who makes sense."

Libby beamed. "I never dreamed you'd actually do it. I really had no idea one lone woman could make the whole world listen. It's wonderful!"

But Betty Jane, busy on the telephone, managed only to smile at Libby.

Finally Bety Jane just let the tele-

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phone ring while she took care of her boys and cleaned up her house and thoroughly shampooed her hair.

By late afternoon the ringing let up. Betty Jane managed to bed her boys down for their naps. She put dinner in the oven and went out on the porch to look at the paper before going upstairs for her shower.

There were pictures of Belinda Bodeenii, but more and larger pictures of Betty Jane. Her statement was there in full. And then, on the editorial page, there was a whole piece about how right she was. Betty Jane felt a little sick. *Proving I was right,* she thought, *I learned I was nuts.* She threw the paper down and marched upstairs for her shower. *To heck with it all,* she thought.

But as she was about to shower, she changed her mind, drew the water for a relaxing tub bath and took time to set her own pale brown hair in curls. Out of the tub, she applied the new perfume, redid her nails, made up carefully.

She chose one of her prettiest, softest new cotton dresses, one that made her look fragile and fresh. She put on earrings, wispy sandals over sheer nylons. She walked slowly downstairs and sat on the love seat in the living room and waited for Kirk.

Strangely enough, or was it strangely, he came home early. Usually, when he arrived, she was busy in the kitchen or with the children. But today, although she could hear the boys stirring and there were last-minute things she could well be doing about dinner, today she sat bewildered and fragrant, her legs crossed, her foot swinging provocatively in the little sandal.

Kirk stood in the doorway and looked at her speculatively.

"Hi," he said.

"Hi," she said.

He grinned at her. "You look nice." He threw his hat on the table, and she saw that he carried a florist's box. He opened it and took out the most beautiful white orchid she had ever seen. He pinned it on her dress.

She bent her head to look at it. Beneath it was a little printed card. It said: *For Betty Jane, in appreciation for doing such a wonderful job raising our kids and keeping our house.*

She looked up at her husband, her eyes wide. "Oh, darling," she said, "I don't understand men at all."

Kirk reached out and hugged her close, orchid and all. "That's what you think." he said. . . . THE END

My Search For Sunshine And Laughter

(Continued from page 45)

dots that make up the Braille alphabet. I kept practicing until I had to rub the tip of my forefinger to restore the circulation.

I have one poignant memory of Miss Clare. I did not meet her again until one day during the fourth grade term when I was in the map room with the rest of the geography class. Unexpectedly the teacher indicated that somebody wished to see me. As soon as I was led to the visitor and ran my fingers over her face, I recognized her as Miss Clare. I was puzzled when she groped with her hand to find mine. Then, in a flash, I realized that *Miss Clare was as blind as I was.* I learned afterward that she had lost her eyesight soon after I left kindergarten. "Bobby," she said, "now I know what it means to be deprived of one's eyes."

During the summer following my graduation from the fourth grade, the residual hearing in my right ear suddenly disappeared. I was sitting with my mother one afternoon playing a game at her feet. I looked up, asked a question but couldn't hear her answer. I bent nearer until I felt her breath directly on my ear. Still no answer. Then we both realized that I was totally deaf. I was nine.

I lost all means of communicating with my family. When it was time to eat, my mother would simply grasp my hand and lead me to the table. When it was time to sleep, I would be picked up like a puppy and put to bed.

The complete loss of my hearing, as well as my sight, made the problem of educating me even more difficult. My parents, after consulting with educational authorities, entered me in Perkins Institution, in Watertown, Massachusetts. Perkins is one of the nation's leading schools for educating deaf and blind children. Here, under the guidance of expert teachers, there was hope that I would gradually be pried loose from my tomb.

I was taught the manual alphabet for the deaf; this is a system of finger and knuckle movements communicated into the palm of the hand, each position representing a letter of the alphabet. My speech had deteriorated to such a degree that virtually the only two words I could enunciate clearly were "hello" and "goodby." Lessons in vibration speech reading were begun. The staff hoped that, if I could be taught to communicate with others through their speech vibrations, I would rediscover how to speak clearly myself.

Miss Inez B. Hall, a speech expert, instructed me to place my thumb over her lips, to press my fingers against her throat just under the line of her lower jaw. I spent long hours learning to "read" the vibrations from her larynx. I was not accustomed to holding my hand in such an unusual position, and at first the muscles of my shoulder throbbed painfully. But, as the lessons continued, my muscles strengthened; my fingers grew less and less weary. Gradually I learned to think in speech vibrations as other people learn to think in a new language. As the months following my loss of hearing lengthened into years, I came to terms with my world of silence as I had done with the darkness. This silence was not a vacuum. It had a personality, indeed several distinct personalities of its own. At times it was a deadweight silence that pressed down on me almost unendurably—a silence so oppressive that, on the warmest days of the year, I would be seized with cold shivers, and yet at other times it was a tender, yielding silence—one that seemed to tremble with the terrible desire to speak. Time and again voices lurked tantalizingly on the borders of my existence, and I was seized with the conviction that, if I bent my ear and subdued the beating of my heart, I would be able to hear it, but always, when I strained for the effort, it eluded me.

Sleep provided me with a world of exciting experiences. My dreams were unusually rich and colorful. In my dreams I saw my father and mother, my sisters, just as if I were completely normal.

During my stay at Perkins I met James K. Edmundson, a lawyer from South Carolina. He often visited his daughter, who was also deaf and blind. He knew the manual alphabet, and he frequently invited me to the ball games at Fenway Park in nearby Boston. When we took our seats in the grandstand, I followed the game eagerly as he narrated the action to me play by play. I became a baseball fan. I sat nervously hunched in my seat, wondering if the batter who had just come up for the Red Sox would knock the ball out of the park.

One day, I decided to take up wrestling. Despite the fear of my teachers that I would be injured, I tried out for the Perkins team. The first night I showed up for practice in a pair of borrowed wrestling tights. Mr. Di Martino, the coach, took me to the center of the big mat, stretched himself out comfortably on his abdomen and told me to turn him over. For fully ten minutes I tugged, pulled and strained at him without success. I could feel him quivering with laughter at every futile assault I made. Although my elbows and knees became bruised from the continual mauling I received tumbling on the mat, I refused to concede that my case was hopeless.

Night after night I practised lifting weights, exercising with pullies, running around a circular track. I climbed a 20-foot rope to develop my arms and shoulders. Gradually my reflexes became more rapid; I developed a sense of muscular balance. I learned how to defend myself and apply a variety of holds. Two seasons after my first practice session, I succeeded in making the team by defeating a competitor in my weight class during the preseason elimination bouts.

I won a good share of my bouts with opponents who could see and hear; in a match with Andover Academy, my victory in the final contest broke a tie and gave Perkins the triumph.

The four years I spent at Perkins were happy. As graduation week approached, Dr. Farrell, the director of Perkins, wrote to the officials of the Industrial Home for the Blind in Brooklyn, New York, asking that I be admitted to their training courses. The IHB specializes in training the deaf and blind in matmaking, basket weaving and other manual labor that will enable them to earn a living. I entered the Home in October, 1946.

In my mind, however, there was another plan. For years I had insisted to my family, "I am going to college."

Only one deaf-blind person had ever succeeded in going through college. This was Helen Keller, 50 years previously.

The staff of the Industrial Home was aware of my ambition. One afternoon when I had been there for less than a year, the director called me into his office.

"Bob, we have given you every standard psychological test available. We believe it may be possible for you to compete on a college level with seeing and hearing students."

The first step was to find a college near the Home. The authorities of St. John's College in Brooklyn were frankly skeptical. But they decided to give me a chance.

The IHB staff made thorough preparations, aware that if I failed it would be all the more difficult for others like me. A search was made for a student companion who would accompany me to classes, spell the lectures of the professors into my hand and translate my lessons into Braille. In June, the Home engaged Johnny Spainer, a high-school graduate who was willing to undergo the necessary intensive training. For this, Johnny received a weekly salary plus his tuition money.

In the meantime the IHB recruited almost 100 volunteers from all over the nation to transcribe into Braille the textbooks I would need. To give an indication of the task confronting these volunteers, twelve bulky volumes of Braille were necessary for the translation of a single textbook in philosophy. The Braille version of a textbook on English literature was shipped in ten volumes that stood 11 feet high from the ground.

I entered St. John's in September, 1946. The first few months were difficult. Johnny acted as my eyes and ears. He translated into my hand everything that went on in the classroom. And after classes, I pored over my bulky Braille textbooks in history, economics and philosophy, struggling to memorize the facts.

Time and time again I was tempted to give up and return to the safe, easier things—making mats, weaving baskets. There were many disheartening incidents. I typed my themes, and Johnny Spainer went over them for typographical errors. One night I excused myself from a social evening with Johnny and his friends. I went into my room and spent four hours typing out a history paper for my class. When I emerged, I handed the sheets to Johnny, breathing a sigh of relief. "It was worth giving up an evening of fun to get this assignment done." Johnny didn't have the heart to answer. Later I learned that my sheets of paper were totally blank. I had taken out my ribbon when I had cleaned the typewriter that morning and forgotten to replace it.

Gradually other students learned the manual alphabet and spelled into my hand. I developed a social life. In my junior year members of the Sigma Tau fraternity invited Johnny and me to join. For my initiation ceremonies, I carried an 18" paddle around the campus. I wore several yards of wide red ribbon tied under my chin and pants rolled up to the knee to give the effect of knickerbockers. On "Hell Night" I was led with other candidates into the gymnasium and put through various paces blindfolded. Needless to say, this was no particular hardship for me.

In the fall of my junior year I had an experience that almost put me out of college. One Sunday afternoon I left the Industrial Home for the Blind with a companion, Wilfred Couturier, who had slight vision. We planned to do some shopping in a nearby store. We stepped down from the curb and started across the street toward Tompkins Avenue. Then the whole world seemed to explode; we were struck by a fast moving bus that lifted me clear off the pavement. When my head cleared, I realized I was lying on my side with my arms flung wide. Instinctively I reached out for Wilfred. I picked up his hand and spelled into it. There was no answering pressure from his fingers.

A crowd of people gathered. Somebody brought a blanket. I was helped into a police car and driven to a hospital. It was found that I was suffering from severe head and leg injuries. I was wheeled to the operating room for surgery. Shortly afterwards I learned that Wilfred had been killed on the spot.

For weeks I lay in the hospital with my right leg in a cast, in the grip of deep depression. Then I was released—on Christmas Eve so that I could spend Christmas at the Home. It felt strange to be dressing. The cast, reaching from my ankle to my hip, held my leg rigid so that I could barely reach my toes with my finger tips. I walked slowly, listing to one side.

In a month I was back at St. John's. Getting about in a cast to my classes—especially those on the fourth floor—was a problem since I had to take one stair at a time, holding on to the railing. But it was good being back.

The following year, in 1950, I was graduated from St. John's *cum laude*. I ranked in the upper ten per cent of my class with a 90.2% average. Commencement was set for a Sunday in June. Johnny helped me into my cap and gown, and we took a taxi to the armory on 34th street in Manhattan where the ceremonies were to be held. Class by class we marched into the auditorium and to our seats. As the baccalaureates and candidates for other degrees were mentioned, the individuals rose to their feet in groups. Then my name was called. The Dean of the College, the Reverend Cyril S. Meyer, was going to present my diploma as a special event. Johnny and I wedged our way through the crowded row to the aisle and walked slowly up to the stage. We stood beside the dean.

"He's reading something," John told me. "It's a special blessing from Pope Pius. Put out your hand; he's ready to give you the diploma and the blessing."

I reached out and took the roll of sheepskin. Father Meyer grasped my right hand warmly. Suddenly I became aware of a new sound; the stage was vibrating with the thunder of applause. It seemed to go on and on. As the applause died away, Father Meyer patted my shoulder.

After graduation, I entered New York University for graduate study and, in 1952, I received my master's degree in the field of vocational rehabilitation for the handicapped. Although I am the only deaf-blind person so far to have earned a degree for graduate study, I am convinced that others will follow and doubtless go even further.

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I underwent training, preparing to lecture before audiences on the needs and problems of the blind and the deaf-blind. Lacking a memory of the human voice since the age of five, I have no conception whatever of the pitch, the intonation of natural human speech. The problem was to train myself to accent words and phrases as hearing people do. Under the guidance of speech specialists I have learned to articulate my words so that audiences can understand them. I have steadily gained confidence as a public speaker. At first I spoke into a microphone, but now I don't need one.

I think that my presence on a lecture platform proves that anyone can be lifted out of the deepest abyss if people refuse to give him up—and if he refuses to give himself up.

Today I do practically all the things normal people do. I lead a full social life. I play bridge and poker (with Braille-marked cards); I dine out in restaurants; on weekends I go deep-sea fishing off Montauk Point on Long Island; I have won trophies for my prize catches. I go dancing in night clubs with normal young women, and I have every intention of getting married soon and rearing a family.

Recently I was lecturing in Patchogue, Long Island, when a young housewife came up to me at the conclusion of my talk and said to me, "Mr. Smithdas, you have given me an absolutely brand new perspective on life. It's as if, for the first time, I have really begun to *see*."

... THE END

What Weddings Should Cost

(Continued from page 59)

Honeymoon: The average honeymoon, one survey reports, lasts two weeks and costs about $350. Favorite spots: Niagara Falls, New York City, Miami Beach and Southern California, with Canada the favorite outside the country. With foreign travel now so popular, packaged honeymoons that include transportation, hotel rooms, sight-seeing and sometimes meals are offered by railroads, airlines and steamship companies. A typical rail trip from New York to Quebec, with 14 days at a large hotel and all meals, costs $375. A ten-day honeymoon in Hawaii, including air transportation from San Francisco or Los Angeles, with good hotel accommodations but no meals, amounts to $775.

HOW TO KEEP DOWN COSTS

How can you economize? Here are some hints:

1. Order everything far enough in advance so that you avoid last-minute waste.
2. Use simple script on the invitations and announcements.
3. Use garden flowers where possible.
4. The bride-to-be (or her mother), if she is clever with a needle, can make a bridal gown at relatively small cost—for $25 worth of fabric and a McCall's Pattern that sells for $1. The same goes for all or part of the trousseau.
5. If a floor-length dress is to be worn, buy inexpensive satin pumps—no one will notice them.
6. A bridal gown that can be used for other purposes can double as part of the trousseau.
7. Afternoon weddings usually are less expensive than those in the evening.
8. Don't order too much wedding cake. Wedding cakes are expensive and often go largely to waste.
9. Isn't there an amateur photographer in the family who is almost as good as a professional and would be willing to take the wedding pictures?
10. In planning the honeymoon, choose a spot that is offering off-season rates. You'll save money—and probably enjoy more privacy and quiet.

One final thought: Would you be better advised to save all this money, and use it instead to help get started in married life? There's nothing in the law that requires an elaborate wedding ceremony. As a matter of fact, all you *must* spend is a couple of dollars for the license.

... THE END

We're Giving Our Children Too Much

(Continued from page 25)

bilities as watching out for a younger brother or sister, making his own bed, or washing the supper dishes.

To put it bluntly, we have embraced a child-rearing philosophy based on the preposterous notion that Junior knows best. Into his arms we pour an endless variety of toys, gadgets and doodads, no matter how worthless or expensive so long as they duplicate what the neighbors' children have. Suburban floors and lawns are strewn with these baubles, some of them given to atone for trivial injustices that guilt-stricken parents think they have inflicted on their children.

In many a home, parents have to forego their favorite television program so that Junior may sit and gape at some imbecile in a space helmet. These same youngsters dictate what they will eat and what they will not; thus the family menu is geared largely to juvenile tastes. And how they are allowed to lord it over the dinner table! With guests present or not, all conversation ceases when Junior interrupts to relate some trifling incident at interminable length.

I have witnessed the tantrums of an eight-year-old whose father had the temerity to purchase a new automobile without whitewalled tires; the boy was upset because every other car on the block had whitewalled tires. Another couple of my acquaintance dropped plans for moving into a new home because their little daughter registered tearful dissention.

These are the same children who fuss over the smallest bump, bruise or blister. Every minor injury gets kissed by Mom, and while Junior bellows, she exclaims over the audacity of the match that burned him, the floor or wall that hit him.

Many pediatricians believe this kind of nonsense has gone too far. "There are some experiences each child has to learn for himself," one said recently. "If you reward a tearful, bruised or bleeding youngster with honeyed words or candy, he will probably forget his lesson and remember only that playing with fire leads to candy."

If school is more than a few blocks from home, these same youngsters have to be driven in a bus or the family car. A teacher friend of mine suggested that her second grade pupils *walk* the four blocks to school to develop their sense of responsibility and self-reliance. Even though policemen patrolled every street crossing, the majority of parents was shocked. According to them, the route to school was infested with reckless drivers, kidnappers and teen-aged bullies. Their children, incidentally, were the ones who never looked after their possessions in the classroom, knowing that Pop would always replace them; never tidied up after themselves because they were accustomed to having Mom do it for them.

A growing number of pediatricians and psychiatrists points out that the *over*-privileged child often grows up with the same neuroses and character defects as the *under*privileged child, that is, the juvenile delinquent who has been seriously deprived in a home stricken by divorce or poverty.

"Parents used to be too strict," say Drs. Spurgeon English and Gerald Pearson of Temple University Medical School. "Then they swung away to being too lenient. Often children today are ill-equipped to bear anxiety that results from frustration and deprivation in later life. Their character has been molded in such a way as to avoid frustration."

The Child Study Association gives succinct support to this observation: "Too many parents give too much to their children and expect too little in return."

What it all adds up to is this: A childhood of self-gratification is unrealistic training for a life that includes some frustration and deprivation for almost everybody. What is going to happen to Johnny, whose every wish has been granted, when he grows up to find that the job he wants is filled by someone else, the girl he loves is wooed and won by another man, or the whitewalled tires he covets are beyond his means?

What makes so many modern parents give too much to their children—too many toys and clothes, too much money, too many privileges, too much protection? As youngsters in the Depression years, these parents probably felt deprived. Now, with love in their hearts, they say, "Our kids won't have to struggle for things as we did." And they proceed to eliminate the need for their children to

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